Ann Webster Smith

Leading at the Beginning

Ernest Allen Connally

Ernest Allen Connally, the first director of the National Park Service's Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation (OAHP), shaped much of the beginning of our cultural resources/historic preservation programs. He played a crucial and unique role in the development of national and state programs for the recognition, protection, and conservation of cultural resources, a framework that exists and prevails today.

But beyond our own borders, he then went on to play a second crucial role. He was a central figure in the development of the international program for recognizing, protecting, and conserving cultural resources in other countries as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) moved toward implementing UNESCO's 1972 World Heritage Convention.

Born in Texas, Connally began his study of architecture at Rice University, took time out for military service in World War II, and received his bachelor of architecture degree from the University of Texas in 1950. Upon completion of his doctorate in architectural history at Harvard University, he began a 15-year teaching career at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, after which he taught at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, and at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, where he was the first professor of architectural history. During this period, he began his association with the National Park Service while leading summer teams for the Historic American Buildings Survey.

A decade later in 1966, Connally joined Ronald Lee, National Park Service historian and manager, and J.O. Brew, a Harvard University archeologist, in a task force charged with planning for implementation of preservation legislation—the National Historic Preservation Act—which was passed later that year. In 1967, just after the legislation became a reality, Connally was invited to join the National Park Service as director of its newly created OAHP.

He and his program were charged with launching the State Historic Preservation Offices, entering the first state nominations on the newly expanded National Register of Historic Places, and working on the development of the Section 106 review process to be undertaken by the new Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, also created by the 1966 legislation.

As head of OAHP, among Connally's first problems in carrying out the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act was the Springfield Armory, a National Historic Landmark, about to be demolished as a part of the Defense Department's military base closing program. The hope was that the Armory could be saved without invoking Section 106 which, at that time, was an idea not yet fleshed out in what were to become the Council's "procedures." There were no precedents on which to base their actions. Connally and his staff had to move cautiously but surely in their efforts to create a program that could defend itself.

In 1986, Connally looked back on 20 years since the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act and commented, "That law

Pictured in 1989, Ernest Allen Connally was the first director of the NPS Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation. Photo courtesy Janice Connally.

vastly increased the scope of historic preservation as public policy and correspondingly increased the duties of the National Park Service while offering it unprecedented opportunity." In explaining how the 1966 legislation built upon the program's beginnings with the Historic Sites Act of 1935, Connally said: "Clearly the enlarged federal responsibility that came with the act of 1966 was meant to extend beyond properties of national significance to include those important at the state and community level." Historic buildings were now to be preserved and restored not only for their educational value as museum exhibits, but also for their continued practical uses and lasting importance in our daily lives.

At the time that the heritage or preservation movement was developing, it became evident that the growing environmental movement was moving forward even faster in efforts that would lead to the passage of the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act and the establishment of the Council on Environmental Quality. In 1969, Connally had been one of those advising the President's Advisory Panel on Environmental Quality that historic preservation concerns should be incorporated into what became the environmental impact review process.

At the same time, outside of the United States, the United Nations was planning a major conference, the Conference on the Human Environment, to be held in Stockholm in 1972, in which the United States would be a major participant. In the year preceding the conference, President Richard Nixon sent a Special Message to Congress proposing an environmental program incorporating measures designed to create a World Heritage program by which international protection could be provided for the natural and cultural heritage of all nations. The proposed international treaty, eventually the World Heritage Convention, would respect the sovereignty of each nation but would recognize and seek protection for the common heritage of all peoples.

At Stockholm, with United States leadership, the World Heritage Convention ("the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage") was adopted and later it was submitted to participating nations for their ratification. During 1973, the United States, which had been so instrumental in the development and passage of the convention, was the first nation to ratify it and in 1975, when a requisite number of ratifications had been filed, the convention went into force.

There has been much misunderstanding about the convention and the way that it works. Each nation determines which of its own properties to nominate to the World Heritage List. Protection for nominated properties grows out of each country's own national, state, provincial, regional, or local regulations. The convention provides neither international protection nor international sanctions concerning nominated or listed properties. There is no mechanism for international enforcement under the convention. UNESCO, the convention, and the committee which it created, have no police authority and, of course, have no authority to take or to administer any property that is accepted for listing.

In 1975, Connally, then president of the United States Committee of ICOMOS, attended the international organization's triennial general assembly, where he was elected Secretary General of ICOMOS. ICOMOS is the only international non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting the application of theory, methodology, and conservation techniques to the conservation of the architectural and archeological heritage. It has its headquarters in Paris and today has 107 national committees and approximately 6,000 members.

The World Heritage Convention names two non-governmental organizations, ICOMOS and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), along with the governmental body, the International Centre for Conservation in Rome (ICCROM), as the three formal advisory bodies to UNESCO's World Heritage Committee. ICOMOS is the professional and scientific advisor to the committee on all aspects of cultural heritage.

Under the convention, the single criterion for inscription on the World Heritage List is that a property, whether cultural or natural, shall be of "outstanding universal value." Obviously, this criterion in not specific enough to guide participating nations in the nomination of properties. Accordingly, the committee has developed additional, more specific criteria for cultural properties and nominated properties must conform to one or more of the specific criteria.

One of the provisions of the convention calls on the state party that nominates a property to guarantee its protection. The United States has taken this requirement very literally and, for the

most part, has nominated only governmental properties, or even more specifically, those in the hands of the National Park Service, for inclusion in the list. The non-National Park Service properties are Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site in Illinois, Pueblo de Taos in New Mexico, and the University of Virginia/Monticello in Virginia. No other state party has taken this tack and the range of properties, whether publicly or privately owned in other countries is far-ranging, whereas those in the United States are limited because of understandable caution on the part of the National Park Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The fact that the United States limited its participation in the convention was a concern to Connally in the years before his death in 1999. He had spent the years since his retirement in writing a book, tentatively entitled "The Origins of the World Heritage Convention," a work that is eagerly awaited by UNESCO and World Heritage participants because it is expected to help in explaining the philosophy and the practical rationale that led to the development of the convention and its commitment to the notion of "outstanding universal value." UNESCO will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the convention in two years and hopes that Connally's book will be published as a part of the celebration of that anniversary.

The 1970s saw many changes in the National Park Service with the establishment of the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (HCRS), which combined history, archeology, architecture, and outdoor recreation in an unlikely bureaucratic marriage of rather disparate interests. Connally became the National Park Service's chief appeals officer for historic preservation certifications, charged with serving as the final arbiter for disputed appeals over decisions regarding certification of historic properties using the federal historic preservation tax incentives. In this capacity, Connally was interested in the development of a body of preservation literature and the publication of articles and other materials setting forth the philosophical standards for heritage conservation programs.

Connally influenced many of us and continues to influence those who didn't even know him. Our work today is a reflection of his concern for heritage, his commitment to professional quality, and the very high standards he set for his own contributions in this country and abroad. The high hopes and high standards of those who have gone before—as represented by Connally—helped to pave the way toward the future of the cultural resources/historic preservation field.

Ann Webster Smith's career in historic preservation spans more than three decades. Today, she is vice president of ICOMOS.

The Statue of Liberty is inscribed on the World Heritage List, a program that developed from the World Heritage Convention. Photo courtesy NPS.